DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 516 SP 025 925

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TITLE Making Early Field Experience Meaningful: An Alternative Approach.
PUB DATE 85
NOTE 31p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (69th, Chicago, IL, March 31-April 4, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Curriculum Development; *Field Experience Programs; Higher Education; *Preservice Teacher Education; *Program Content; *Program Development; Program Effectiveness; Research Utilization; Teacher Education Programs
IDENTIFIERS *Early Field Experience

ABSTRACT

Critics of Early Field Experience (EFE) for preservice teachers have cited a need for shifting focus away from logistical questions (e.g., quantity of time spent in the field, legal questions, administrative schedules) and toward promoting a critically meaningful educational experience for preservice teachers. This paper describes an EFE at Washburn University, Topeka, Kansas, that promotes three critical goals: (1) the empowerment of teachers as curriculum developers; (2) the rejection of technocratic approaches to curriculum design and the creation of viable alternatives; and (3) the encouragement of reflective thinking as an integrative aspect of teaching. Prior to this description, a critique of traditional field experiences is developed to provide a context from which Washburn's program can be discussed. The program's description includes the components and the significant characteristics that reflect its critical nature. Students' evaluation of the program are used to illustrate the program's potential benefits for future teachers. (Author/JD)

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MAKING EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCE MEANINGFUL:

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

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A paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, March-April, 1985, Chicago, IL.

SP025925

MAKING EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCE MEANINGFUL: AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

In recent years, teacher preparation programs within the United States have placed greater emphasis upon early field experiences (EFEs) within their curriculum (AACTE, 1976). Many state departments of education now mandate EFEs prior to student teaching (e.g. MacNaughton, Johns, & Rogus, 1982; Moore, 1979), and nearly all teacher education programs in this country now include some type of EFE requirement (Ishler & Kay, 1981: 15-22). As a number of educators suggest, the assumption behind this trend seems to be that the greater the number of hours students[1] spend in classrooms the better prepared they will be upon entering the profession (e.g., Beyer, 1984; Zeichner, 1980).

While the above assumption is almost universally accepted among educators, students, and lay people; critical studies of both student teaching experiences and EFEs have questioned its validity (e.g. Goodman, in press, 1985; Hooper & Johnson, 1973; Iannaccone, 1963; Salzillo & Van Fleet, 1977; Tabachnick, Popkewitz, & Zeichner, 1979-80; Tabachnick, 1980). This research has found that most field experiences have emphasized student performance of specific instructional techniques such as managing basal textbook programs and keeping children "on task." The findings suggest that field experiences often contribute to students' passivity as they learn how to merely fit into the conservative and established patterns of traditional school practice, rather than help future teachers to become more experimental, reflective, and active in their approach to education. Drawing upon these and other research studies, a number of educators have argued that we need to shift our present focus away from logistical questions of EFEs (e.g. quantity of time spent in the field, legal questions, administrative schedules) and towards a more substantive understanding of what characteristics promote a critically meaningful educational experience for preservice teachers. Recently, a small but growing body of educators have called for, and in a few cases established, EFEs that go beyond the mere technical training of students to

reflect a more critical perspective (e.g. Adler, 1984; Denton, 1983; Erdman, 1983; Felker, 1984; Martin, 1984).

In an effort to contribute to this emerging body of literature, this paper will describe an EFE at Washburn Universtiy in Topeka, Kansas that promotes three critical goals: 1) the empowerment teachers as curriculum developers, 2) the rejection of technocratic approaches to curriculum design and the creation of viable alternatives, and 3) the encouragement of reflective thinking as an integrative aspect of teaching.[2] Prior to this description, a critique of traditional field experiences is developed to provide a context from which Washburn's program can be discussed. The program's description will include its components and the significant characteristics that reflect its critical nature. Following this description, students' evaluations of the program will be used to illustrate the program's potential benefits for future teachers.

The Problem of Excessive Realism: The Development of Utilitarian Teaching Perspectives and the Deskilling of Preservice Teachers

While the present paper is not the place for a detailed analysis of field based experiences within teacher education, recent research in this area has raised a number of concerns worthy of our attention. As is common in most institutional settings, students enter a preexisting world when placed in a practicum site. This "world" has certain customs, rules, belief systems, and behavior patterns that are largely taken for granted as normal. "Institutions, by the very fact of their existence, control human conduct by setting up predefined patterns of conduct which control it in one direction as against the many other directions that would theoretically be possible" (Berger & Luckmann, 1967: 59). Students confront both overt and covert forces within their field placements that significantly influence their behavior and attitudes.

Tabachnick et al. (1979-80) and others have found that students tend to

"practice teach" by participating in routine, mechanical instructional activities that require little creativity or thoughtfulness (e.g. Goodman, 1985). Students were mostly observed drilling and/or testing for pupil "competency" of prespecified, short term facts and/or skills. The emphasis was on having children read, memorize, and repeat "correct answers" found in textbooks and workbooks. Often, students accepted the practices found in their placements as the upper and outer limits of what was possible. Katz (1974) described this uncritical acceptance of school practices as "excessive realism." The knowledge systems that students confront, they way in which this knowledge is taught to children, and the pupils' responses (i.e. the activity of learning) tend to be reified. Few individuals understand the socially constructed nature of school life; and as a result, Katz suggests that there is little, if any, searching for potential alternatives.

Several research studies within the United States and Great Britain have provided fairly consistent findings about the impact of field experiences upon students' perspectives towards teaching[3] (e.g. Gibson, 1976; Iannaccone, 1963; Popkewitz, 1979; Tabachnick et al., 1979-80; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984). These studies suggest that field experiences have generally contributed to the development of "utilitarian perspectives" in which teaching is separated from its underlying educational, social, and/or ethical dimensions. In particular, students view teaching as primarily a technical activity of management. In many EFEs, students' learning is limited to management skills such as how to: efficiently grade workbooks and tests, lead small group instruction through basal textbooks, keep children busy with "seatwork" while leading groups, as well as take care of the daily roll, supervise the transportation of pupils from one place to another, run-off dittos, and finally, keep track of everyone's schoolwork (paper trail). Getting the pupils through the required lesson(s) on time in a

quiet, smooth, and orderly fashion becomes the main criteria for judging successful practice teaching. The important consideration is finding those instructional techniques that "work," i.e. keep the children "on task," in control, and proceeding at the proper rate. This perspective suggests that techniques become an ends in themselves rather than means towards some broader educational or social purpose as determined by the teacher (or student).

It is commonly assumed that universities offer a more substantive view of teaching, but that the impact of the field experience counteracts the university's efforts (e.g. Hoy and Rees, 1977; Jacobs, 1968). However, a number of researchers have suggested that, in fact, universities tend to support these utilitarian perspectives among students (e.g. Bartholomew, 1976; Giroux, 1980; Goodman, 1983, 1983a; Zeichner, 1980; Zeichner and Tabachnick, 1981). For example, in seminar meetings and/or during supervisory conferences, university instructors often failed to raise substantive questions about the students' practicum experiences or the nature of education. Instead, discussions usually addressed solving short term management problems (Goodman, 1983; Tabachnick et al., 1979-80). By focusing on questions of "how" to teach and ignoring underlying questions of "why" and "what" to teach, the university tends to encourage acquiescence and conformity to the existing, conservative routines found in the schools.

Due to the problem of "excessive realism" and the development of utilitarian teaching perspectives, a number of educators suggest that students (and teachers) are becoming "deskilled" (e.g. Apple, 1982: 135-164; Carlson, 1982, Gitlin, 1980; Goodman, 1985). These individuals have borrowed from industrial studies such as Braverman's (1974) analysis of the emerging labor process. Braverman concludes that as a result of the increased emphasis on specialization and efficiency, workers are gradually losing control over their craft and becoming increasingly dependent upon experts and production demands that are made without their input.

The results of this emerging labor process include: the fragmentation of work into discrete activities, restrictions on the range of possible work related activities, systematic repetition of those activities, and separation of work from the social and ethical responsibility underlying production.

These researchers suggests that making the leap from work in an industrial setting to teaching/learning in schools is not difficult. As a result of the competency based, accountability, and testing movements within education; many schools now demand that teachers use pre-packaged curriculum programs specifically designed to increase pupils' scores on standardized tests. These programs come complete with specific learning objectives (i.e. content), step by step instructional procedures (pre-test/drillwork/post-test), and quantitative exams to measure exactly what pupils learn. From this perspective, test scores are the product, pupils are the workers, and teachers (students) are the managers or shop foremen/women. Just as workers and managers are becoming more controlled and deskilled through systematic application of scientific management, the range of teaching and learning activities found in many classrooms are greatly restricted through these "teacher proof" curriculum programs.

Rather than learning to be craftspeople who are active in developing curriculum based upon their own and/or their pupils' interests and who are able to creatively use materials, personal talents, and innovative resources in planning and implementing learning activities; pre- and inservice teachers are becoming passive technicians who merely learn to execute pre-packaged "instructional programs." Rather than providing an opportunity to experiment within practicum sites and reflect upon substantive concerns of education, field experiences often systematically narrow students' conceptions of teaching and learning. As Dewey (1904) warned, many students learn to be technically proficient during their EFEs but at a cost to their professional growth.

While on the surface it may seem that these research findings would support a call to significantly limit or even eliminate EFEs, upon closer analysis one can see the potential value of these experiences. In each of the field based research studies mentioned above, there were a minority of students who were reflective and who (in some cases) went beyond routine classroom activity. These individuals had the opportunity to not only learn what schools expect from teachers and pupils, but also to consider the educational and/or social value of these expectations. In a few cases, instructional alternatives were examined and put into practice as students experimented within a particular classroom. Given the right cooperating teacher, the right classroom atmosphere, and the right support and guidance from university instructors; these few students were able to use their field experiences to develop a greater sense of professional autonomy in their teaching. In a recent symposium on EFEs, the participants argued that EFEs offer an ideal opportunity for those educators interested in helping students to become more thoughtful and active teachers.[4] Unlike student teaching in which students are immersed in the daily routines of the classroom and there is often intense pressure to learn the "nuts and bolts" of running a classroom, EFEs give students time outside of class to reflect upon their teaching and to critically examine school life. When connected to innovative university coursework, EFEs can help students experiment with creative teaching strategies (e.g. Denton, 1983; Erdman, 1983; Goodman,in press; Martin, 1984).

Washburn's Early Field Experience

There are several programmatic options that could conceivably be developed in response to the previous discussion. For example, Gitlin and Teitelbaum (1983) describe how having students do ethnographic studies can increase their ability to critically analyze school life, Zeichner (1981) illustrates the way in which a campus based seminar can promote reflective inquiry among students while they are

student teaching, and Taxel (1982) discusses how a language arts methods course can use children's literature to sensitize students to critical issues such as racism and sexism in schools and society. The strategy described in this paper reflects efforts to redesign an EFE at Washburn University in which students participate during the semester prior to their full time student teaching.

As part of an internal evaluation of Washburn's teacher preparation program, we discovered that many of the research findings mentioned in the previous section of this paper applied to this EFE. That is, most students did little more than observe their cooperating teachers teach, run-off dittos, grade papers and tests, help children with their workbooks, or at most, teach an occasional lesson directly out of a basal textbook. There was little connection between university coursework and students' activities in the field, nor was there an opportunity for students to reflect upon their experiences.

In response to this evaluation, we developed a Block experience made up of three integrated components. The first component was comprised of two university courses. As will be more fully discussed in the next section of this paper, "Social Studies in the Elementary/Middle Schools" taught students to develop and implement curriculum from a critical perspective (Goodman, 1985a). Central to this process, these individuals were exposed to numerous resources for and methods of teaching history, sociology (social issues), and anthropology within the elementary/middle school classroom. "Creative Experiences in the Classroom" exposed students to the cognitive principles, resources, and methods of integrating music, art, and creative dramatics into the study of subject matter. The other two components of the Block included: 1) a supervised, nine week practicum experience in which students were placed in a regular elementary or middle school classroom for three afternoons each week, and 2) a weekly seminar meeting conducted by the university supervisor in which students reflected upon

and integrated the knowledge gained from the other components of the Block.

Significant Characteristics

Although a few important structural changes were made in redesigning this Block (e.g. supervision of students, seminar meetings, increased time in the field from 2 to 3 afternoons each week), we understood that our most crucial task was to reconceptualize the underlying purpose of our work. In this endeavor, we drew from Dewey's (1904) notion of apprenticeship versus laboratory field experiences. Dewey saw the apprenticeship as a final, culminating experience in which students would refine their instructional techniques on a day-to-day basis. However, he warned against placing students in these experiences before they developed the "habit of reflection." He suggested that if students were placed in apprenticeship experiences too soon they would be overly influenced by the on-going practices found in their placements, and the result would be mindless imitation.

Laboratory experiences, according to Dewey, would occur prior to an apprenticeship, and they would be designed to foster reflective criticism within students towards the nature of instruction, curriculum, and the purpose(s) of education. He emphasized the need for instructional experimentation, creative curriculum development, and the evolution of an educational philosophy among students as they worked with children (Nolan, 1982). Perhaps the most important aspect of laboratory experiences is the degree of university involvement in creating an environment conducive for reaching the above goals. Dewey believed that the relatively safe atmosphere of a campus laboratory school was the ideal setting for promoting inquiry and experimentation. While it was not economically feasible to maintain a campus school, we felt it important to implement Dewey's notions, as much as possible, within public school settings. As a result of this reconceptualization, a number of significant characteristics emerged that

reflected this Block's critical nature.

Curriculum Development and Implementation

In contrast to viewing teachers as merely managers of instructional programs, the focus of this EFE was to help students become the creators of the curriculum used in their classrooms (Ben-Peretz, 1980; Carre, Ben-Peretz, & Sutton, 1977; Carson, 1984). The central assignment of this Block was for students to develop and implement (in their practicum site) an original social studies unit based upon their own and/or their pupils' intellectual interests. As previously mentioned, a critical approach to curriculum design was taught to these students. While space does not allow for a complete discussion of this approach, it rejects and offers an alternative to the technocratic, systems management perspective towards curriculum design that emphasizes the predetermination of specific content (i.e. learning objectives) and a pre-test/drillwork/post-test process of instruction.[5]

In choosing a topic for study, students were asked to reflect upon their own interests and upon what knowledge was worth exploring with the pupils in their practicum sites. They were asked not only to consider skills and talents necessary for adulthood (e.g. reading, writing, speaking), but also topics that would enrich the children's lives (Dewey, 1902). As representative examples, the following units were developed during the Spring semester of 1984: a) "Super Views of the News" - a critical examination of our mass media and the role it plays in our society (grade 6); b) "The Fifties: A Decade of Fun and Fear" - a study of what life was like in America during the 1950's with particular reference to the forms of entertainment, McCarthyism, and the civil rights movement (grade 5); and c) "Human Beings: What Are We" - an exploration of the physical, emotional, and intellectual aspects of being human both as an individual and as part of a community (grade 1).

After deciding upon a topic, students developed the unit's curriculum around

broad issues, concepts, and/or themes using web diagrams (Kohl, 1976: 37-54; Rachelson & Copeland, 1983). Knowledge was used as a catalyst for stimulating and/or satiating a child's curiosity. An essential aspect of knowledge is its ambiguity and constant change. Rather than emphasizing objectives (e.g. facts, skills and "right answers"), themes contained questions, theories, and mysteries, as well as specific information. Once the initial web was developed, students increased their own knowledge base of the topic through additional readings, and they conducted research to discover interesting resources from which their pupils could explore the unit's themes. Finally, students developed and organized learning activities that illuminated these themes and stimulated their pupils' curiosity, thinking, and creative abilities. For example, instead of emphasizing the names, dates, and places associated with European explorers; one student's 5th grade unit studied the topic of exploration. Pupils investigated what characteristics are found in explorers, why individuals seek new horizons, and the diverse focus for exploration (e.g., one's self, a field of knowledge, new landscapes, life). In addition to learning about European explorers, pupils discovered that many individuals have explored the unknown including Native Americans, scholars, and themselves. While the pupils acquired specific knowledge, the emphasis was on their investigation into the above themes.

The role of teacher as technician was clearly discouraged in this EFE. Developing and implementing curriculum in this Block was similar to producing a documentary or writing an article on a given topic. It required interest in the subject matter, motivation and skill to research relevant information, energy to discover innovative resources, and creative talent to organize the findings of this work into a challenging form that children could understand and enjoy.

Opportunities for Reflection

Encouraging students to think critically about their experience in schools

was another important characteristic of this Block. Van Manen's (1977) analysis of reflection and teaching was helpful in our efforts. Van Manen identified three levels of reflection, each one emphasizing a different focus. The first level of reflection is concerned with specific techniques needed to reach stated objectives. The worth of these objectives is taken for granted, and the criteria for reflection are limited to technological issues (e.g. accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness). At this level of reflection, students are concerned with "what works" in keeping their pupils quiet and on task.

At the second level of reflection, students focus on the relationship between educational principles and practice. However, as Dewey (1933) emphasizes, it is not enough to give merely an educational rationale for certain practices. This level of reflection also implies the need to assess the educational implications and consequences of both actions and beliefs. As a result, there is debate over principles and goals.

The third level of reflection addresses both ethical and political concerns as part of educational discourse. Principles such as justice, equality, and emancipation are used as criteria in deliberations over the value of educational goals, curriculum content, and teaching practices. At this level of reflection, students begin to identify the link between classroom life and broader social forces and structures.

One of our major goals was to incorporate Van Manen's second and third levels of reflection into components of the Block. As a number of educators suggest (e.g. Cohn, 1981; Feiman, 1979; Sarason, Davidson, & Blatt, 1962; Zeichner, 1981), during supervisory conferences and seminar meetings reflective discussions were usually based upon students' practical concerns. For example, a specific management or discipline problem often stimulated discussions on the alienation of children, social control versus freedom, and/or external versus internal

discipline. As students considered different approaches to solve the particular problem, they also discussed these underlying concerns. Since a major focus of seminar meetings was to have students question the taken-for-granted routines of schooling and explore viable alternatives, each semester these discussion groups considered the teacher's role as a potential change agent in the school. Using Kohl's (1976: 119-163) notion of the "politics of teaching," students examined the constraints against and possible strategies to promote progressive change within our schools, as well as the students' desires to pursue such activities.

Substantive questions of education were also integrated into the Block's courses. For example, as students were exposed to various resources and methods for teaching history, they were asked whose history have we traditionally taught in schools and why? During the study of anthropology in the classroom, the students examined issues of ethnocentrism and cross cultural oppression. In the course, "Creative Experiences in the Classroom," they were asked to reflect upon what role the creative and performing arts play (or should play) in our schools and society.

Finally, student reflection was developed through their written coursework. The culminating assignment for this Block was for students to write term papers in which they create an approach to social studies curriculum design. First, they titled their approach which reflected its general focus. Some recent titles have been: "An Active Learning Approach," "A Multi-Perceptual Approach," and "An Integrated Approach." More important than any given title, in this paper students described the essential characteristics and educational principles of their approach, developed a social and/or educational rationale for using it in schools, and finally, described their unit as an example of their approach in practice. Throughout the paper, students used readings from this Block and other courses they had taken to support their ideas. During the last few days of the semester,

they presented their approach and unit to the other members of the class, thus helping them learn how to articulate their ideas. A few students recently presented their papers at the 1984 Kansas Council for the Social Studies meeting in an effort to more fully develop their reflective and expressive abilities.

As Dewey (1904) notes, one of the primary goals of EFEs should be to help future teachers become "students of education," individuals who actively inquire into the complex dynamics of teaching, curriculum, learning, and the relationship between schools and society. To reach this goal, students must have numerous opportunities for reflection throughout each component of their EFE.

Laboratory Teaching

Another major characteristic of this Block was the laboratory nature of the students' field experiences. We did not assume that just placing students in classrooms would automatically result in their professional growth. In placing students in EFE classrooms, a number of considerations were taken into account.

First, the amount of time students spent in the field was carefully determined. Having students in their placements three afternoons each week gave them enough time to establish a feeling of rapport with their pupils, and provided them with a realistic opportunity to teach a fairly comprehensive unit of study. Most students spent six to twelve instructional hours (time spent interacting with pupils) implementing their units. Rather than perceiving their EFE as solely "practice for the future," students were in their placements long enough to develop a genuine sense of commitment towards their class, and they became aware that their presence had a potentially significant and immediate affect upon their pupils. In addition, as Salzillo and Van Fleet (1977) suggest, students were asked to be "participant observers" as well as preservice teachers in their practicum sites. In their role as observers, students examined and eventually gained insight into the educational environment, the interpersonal dynamics, and

the internal and external forces that influence the teaching/learning process in their field placements. A sufficient amount of time in a given school was necessary in order for the students to make thoughtful observations. Students' insights often became the focus for seminar and/or supervisory discussions.

As previously mentioned (see p. 8), this EFE supported students' efforts to experiment with curriculum and instructional strategies. In teaching their units, students were encouraged to take risks and implement previously untried activities. Many students applied the knowledge gained from their "Creative Experiences in the Classroom," course into their lessons. They had pupils do art work; create classroom dramas, filmstrips, or slide shows; and/or play musical instruments as a means to explore the unit's themes. Each semester, a number of students organized field trips, guest speaker appearances, and/or social action projects as part of their units (Ahern & Lucas, 1975: 28-43 & 60-70). Rather than setting up a predetermined skill list to "master," this EFE intended to have students discover their own approaches to instruction, reflect upon their teaching, and through dialogue, learn from these experiences.

This experimentation could only flourish in a relatively safe, open environment. As a result, there was a concerted effort made to find and work with those cooperating teachers who would allow students to develop and implement a unit of their own creation, support students' "unusual" ideas even when they might not work, encourage student participation in their class, and help students reflect upon their teaching. In addition, the university's role in this EFE was significantly expanded. As Evans advocates (1983), the university supervisor not only observed students teach and conducted conferences, but s/he also served as a consultant to the cooperating teachers. In this endeavor, the supervisor played an active role in communicating the EFE's goals and purposes to the people involved, offered advice on setting up the practicum schedule (at what rate will

the student assume teaching responsibilities), took time to discuss classroom concerns with the cooperating teachers, and served as a resource person for students and cooperating teachers. In addition, each cooperating teacher received a comprehensive guidebook, and participated in an orientation meeting at the beginning of each semester. Finally, the program director also worked with the cooperating teachers in much the same way as the supervisor. S/he helped facilitate communication between all the participants in the EFE, made regular visits to the practicum sites to address any concerns that individuals might have had, and offered inservice workshops and other consulting services to cooperating schools.

Although this EFE was not campus based, Dewey's (1904) notions of a laboratory experience (e.g. reflection and experimentation) could be largely implemented due to the healthy relationship that was developed between the public schools and the university. Teachers were especially willing to work with the university when they understood that we were not only asking for them to help us, but were also interested in helping them (Martin & Wood, 1984).

Personnel

In describing innovation, educators tend to focus on the purposes, structures, components, job descriptions, and activities associated with a given program. Too often, we forget or simply ignore the most crucial element of all educational endeavors: the people who participate in them. More that anything other characteristic, it was the individuals who worked in this EFE that determined its substance. First, Washburn is fortunate in that it is a relatively small university in a mid-size city. As a result, we were able to recruit and work with only those cooperating teachers who generally agreed with the goals and purposes of this Block. In this sense, these teachers played an active role in helping develop the type of experience we wanted to create. The teachers who

worked in our program did not merely provide a classroom within which students could be placed. To the contrary, they viewed themselves as an integral part of our teacher preparation faculty.

Similarly, the course instructors and seminar leader/supervisor also had a strong commitment to the critical characteristics upon which the program was based. There were few "territory" disputes, as everyone recognized the value of working together. Communication between faculty members was frequent. Syllabi from each course in the Block was jointly discussed, and a concerted effort was made to link ideas together from each of the courses during class and/or seminar meetings.

Finally, the students were perhaps the most important factor in this EFE. Most of the students at Washburn grew up and lived near the university. Unlike the stereotypical portrait of college students that is found in the mass media, most individuals in this program were not going to college simply to "have a good time." The vast majority were hard working, serious, and dedicated to the teaching profession. In addition, approximately 25% of the students were older individuals between the ages of 25-45 who returned to college after working in other situations. These students brought a depth of knowledge and experience with them that significantly contributed to the quality of what happened in both the university classes and field placements. Although most students came from relatively conservative backgrounds and initially expressed traditional views of teaching; they were also, however, openminded individuals who had a genuine concern for quality education. As a result, most students were willing to consider critical viewpoints and experiment with alternative approaches to curriculum development and implementation.

Educational programs cannot be mass produced and franchised like fast food restaurants. A program, itself, cannot have a "perspective" apart from the people

who work it. In recognizing the crucial role that individuals play in creating a given social reality, we can hopefully avoid the simplistic notion that "models" of teacher preparation can be easily duplicated in accordance with specified principles.

Potential Benefits

Systematic research into the way in which students were affected by their participation in this Block has not been conducted. However, based upon students' coursework and written evaluations of their experiences, some potential benefits can be discussed.

Perhaps the primary benefit of this Block was its attempt to link theory with practice. Most teacher preparation programs have a separation between the world of educational ideologies and the activities of students in field placements. Progressive notions of teaching, learning, and curriculum content that are discussed in university courses often get "forgotten" once students enter the classroom.

Through seminar meetings, supervisory conferences, and course discussions; students developed the habit of reflecting upon substantive concerns and implications for practice as they worked on their units. As previously mentioned, students were asked to seriously consider what would be worthwhile topics to explore with the children in their practicum sites. Unit themes often reflected the thoughtful dialogue that occurred on campus (see p. 12). For example, units on non-industrial cultures or minority cultures within the United States often raised issues of cross cultural conflict. Students who developed historical units made efforts to emphasize the role that all people played in the creation of history, rather than overemphasizing the role of famous white men. A number of students developed units on contemporary sociopolitical issues such as ecology, human rights, and nuclear arms. Others integrated substantive issues into more

traditional units. For example, a 3rd grade unit on "careers" included themes such as: unusual occupations (e.g. artists), the role of women in the workforce, the notion of class conflict, and the problems individuals face when unemployed. These units exposed children to many viewpoints of a given issue and encouraged their participation in society.

The link between theory and practice was also strengthened through the students' term papers and presentations. Having students: a) create an approach to curriculum design, b) develop a set of educational and/or social principles as a basis for this approach, and c) describe their unit as an example of their approach enabled them to understand, in a concrete manner, the relationship between abstract ideals and social reality.

> (A)t times I was a bit overwhelmed and lost due to the amount of material that was covered....But the paper and presentation really pulled things together for me. Developing my approach helped me begin to develop a philosophy of teaching and to back my ideas up with reasons. The paper was difficult but worthwhile in that I now feel I can contribute some of my own ideas to the field of education. (excerpt from student's evaluation)

After listening to each others presentations, many students mentioned that they now could "see" how progressive concepts of education could (if given institutional support) be put into practice. The two most repeated comments found on students' evaluations of the Block were that it encouraged them "to think" (consider critical viewpoints), and it was "practical."

Another benefit was that students' sense of professional autonomy and creativity was enhanced through their participation in this Block. Deciding on a topic, developing its themes, discovering resources, planning learning activities, and organizing this work into a comprehensive unit of study broadened most students' conceptions of teaching. Rather than seeing themselves as educational

technicians or as managers of predetermined curriculum, students' began to view themselves as craftspeople. At the center of this craft is the talent to develop and implement original units of study based upon their own and/or their pupils' interests. As students worked on their units, they gained self confidence in their ability to make important curricular and instructional decisions.

> The most exciting concept I got from this (Block) was that my students (pupils) and I have the power to "create knowledge." I no longer feel that I, as a teacher, have to know everything before I teach it to kids. I realize that I could teach just about any topic to kids because now I know how to research and find resources for us to learn from. (excerpt from student's evaluation)

Since most pupils became interested in and excited about their units, students recognized that they could design more thoughtful and challenging learning experiences than those found in many standardized, instructional programs.

By encouraging students to develop their own unit of study and experiment with creative learning activities, the problem of "excessive realism" was directly confronted. Instead of viewing their role as simply "fitting into" the preexisting patterns found in their practicum sites, these individuals created their own teaching reality.

> The most important thing I learned from this experience is to assert myself and ask questions to see if I could try things. I'm the kind of person who has real difficulty in confronting authority figures, but with your (the supervisor/seminar leader) help, I've overcome a lot of my fears. (excerpt from student's evaluation)

As students' sense of autonomy grew, their interest in the "politics of teaching" (Kohl, 1976: 119-163) increased. By the end of the semester, many students wanted to learn more about strategies for creating "freedom" within the constraints of

the public schools.

It is important to note that not all students valued the focus of this Block. Each semester there have been a couple of students who only marginally completed their unit assignment due to a lack of interest, motivation, and/or intellectual capability.

> I didn't do very well this semester because I thought it (the Block) was basically worthless. As teachers, we are going to be expected to teach out of a textbook. Instead of wasting our time developing units, I think you should teach us the best way to use these textbooks. (excerpt from student's evaluation)

The students who verbally expressed the greatest satisfaction with the Block were curious individuals who enjoyed exploring knowledge found in the world around us. These students thrived on the autonomy that was given to them in this EFE, they liked the challenge of developing innovative learning experiences for children, and they saw their ability to design unique curriculum units as essentially a creative endeavor.

Conclusion

This paper has detailed how one EFE can be used to provide a critically meaningful experience for preservice teachers. Although the potential benefits of this experience are significant, more than the good intentions of a few individuals and the existence of viable alternatives are needed to change school practices (Stake & Easley, 1978). What happens in this Block hardly constitutes a panacea for the ills found within teacher preparation or schools in general. The relationship between school practice and the socio-cultural context within which it exists is complex, and no one strategy can be expected to fundamentally alter the present system. Clearly, these students did not become radicals calling for the complete transformation of schools and society. However, the Block did help

most students look critically at the process and underlying values of educating children, realistic alternatives for progressive change within public schools, and their role(s) as future teachers. Given the retrenchment mentality that now dominates education and the skills orientation of many teacher preparation programs, we think this accomplishment is noteworthy.

Most educators agree that no teacher preparation program (no matter what orientation or quality) can fully develop an individual's professional talent (e.g. Katz, 1974; Schaefer, 1967; Zeichner, 1981). As a result, we need to carefully examine the EFEs in our programs and ask, "Are these conditions or procedures likely to support continuing professional development or are they more likely to close a teacher off from continuing learning" (Feiman-Nemser, 1979: 15). From our perspective, EFEs that merely help improve students' technical skills by teaching them how to fit into present classroom routines is inadequate. If EFEs are to <u>educate</u> and not just <u>train</u> future teachers, than critical alternatives that emphasize reflection and experimentation need to be developed.

Once these alternatives are well established, we need to conduct longitudinal research to explore what happens to students during these EFEs, their student teaching, and into their first year of work within a public school. Of particular concern is the way in which critically oriented EFEs affect students' teaching perspectives, how these perspectives change (if at all) in subsequent experiences, and what psychological, social, and institutional forces help determine the development of students' perspectives. From this research, insights can be gained that will help us improve the potential impact of our efforts.

Notes

[1] To enhance the reading of this paper, the following word guide is provided: Educator - one who teaches in a university teacher preparation program; Student - one who is enrolled in a college level teacher education program; Pupil - a child enrolled in an elementary or middle school.

[2] Until the fall of 1984, the author was the director of Washburn University's Block III program within its Department of Education.

[3] The concept of perspectives captures the ideas, beliefs, and behaviors of individuals within a given social context (Becker, Geer, Hughes, & Strauss, 1961). Unlike more abstract constructs, perspectives are set in the concrete world of actual situations and refer to particular actions. Teacher perspectives take into account how the situation of the school and classroom is experienced; how this situation is interpreted given the teacher's background of experiences, beliefs, and assumptions; and how this interpretation is manifested in behaviors (Cornbleth, 1982; Grace, 1978; Hammersley, 1977; Tabachnick et al., 1979-80; Zeichner, 1981).

[4] This symposium was organized by Jane Applegate (Kent State University), and its participants included: Jean Erdman (University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh), Susan Adler (Rockhurst College), Ralph Martin (Ohio University), and Jesse Goodman (Indiana University).

[5] This technocratic mentality has engendered a number of curriculum trends within our schools including: scientific curriculum making (Bobbitt, 1924; Charters, 1923), the behavioral objectives movement (Kibler, Barker, & Miles, 1970; Popham & Baker, 1969), competency based education (Burns & Klingstedt, 1973), and computer assisted, individualized learning systems (Talmage, 1975). It is important to note that other courses within Washburn's program exposed students to these system management approaches. As a result, they considered a variety of

curriculum perspectives before graduation. For a critique of technocratic curriculum design and a description of the alternative approach taught in this Block see Goodman (1985a).

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